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Title : Geographic Distribution and Species Diversity of Cetaceans...on Postage Stamps

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Student :

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Abstract : Postage stamps offer a novel means of promoting the conservation of cetaceans, as well as stimulating an interest in their biology. The popularity of issuing stamps depicting whales, dolphins, and porpoises is evident; our survey yielded 1,478 images (some stamps depicted multiple species on the same stamp) from 173 countries or stamp-issuing authorities. Grenada had the most images (81), followed by Gambia (53), the Turks and Caicos (39), Palau (39), Ghana (31), Sierra Leone (31), and Tanzania (31). Several resource-poor countries produce topical stamps, seeing them as a useful form of income.

Many stamps feature cetaceans as the subject, others as part of a composite image on a souvenir sheet or in a stamp's border design. Many images reflect an increased awareness and interest in cetaceans, as well as marine life in general. In particular, International Year of the Ocean (1998) was a multi-national stamp issue that generated many depictions of cetaceans. In our study, some stamps display ancient cetaceans, cetaceans' role in culture (various art forms), and conservation/management-related issues, such as whaling and ecotourism. Interestingly, many stamp issues had no relevance to cetaceans, yet an image of this group of animals was included on the souvenir sheet.

Over 1,260 stamp faces had depictions of cetaceans where species identity could be determined. Over 60 species of cetaceans were represented, with the humpback whale being the most popular species - (featured on 164 stamps), followed by the sperm whale (111), killer whale (106), and bottlenose dolphin (104). Lesser-known species, such as Fraser's dolphin, occasionally appear on stamps. Over 160 stamps were of stylized whales or dolphins where we were unable to determine a species identity. Stylized/artistic dolphins and whales were sometimes part of a country's coat of arms (e.g., Australia and Barbados), flags (Antigua). Twenty-four stamps featured cartoon dolphins or whales.